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Message from Ms Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO,

on the occasion of World Radio Day

“The role of the radio in humanitarian emergency and disaster situations”

13 February 2016

Humanitarian emergencies and disasters are increasing worldwide, with terrible consequences for human lives, sometimes reducing years of development to dust.

Amidst the ruins and in the face of an emergency, the radio is often the first medium for survival. Its durability is an incomparable advantage, often enabling it to resist shocks and retransmit messages of protection and prevention to as many people as possible, better and faster than other media, saving lives.

Its proximity, simplicity and low cost also make the radio a medium that promotes community living, providing a way to strengthen social ties and ensure people's participation in humanitarian programmes and the discussions that inform them. Innumerable accounts by victims describe how the radio has enabled separated families to find each other, make contact and regain hope. Community radio is a perfect example of this and must be supported.

The power of the radio also relies on journalists, who are some of the first on the scene to witness events and give a voice to local actors and victims, to raise awareness and mobilize resources, without which there is no effective humanitarian action. They play a crucial role in presenting the facts, avoiding the sensationalism or manipulation of public debate. That is why nothing must call into question the right to be informed or the safety of journalists.

UNESCO has set up early warning systems for tsunamis, floods and droughts, as well as monitoring systems for earthquakes and landslides. The Organization provides worldwide technical assistance for all types of risk. When protected sites

are endangered, UNESCO steps in to save cultural and historical references. At all of these levels, by its ability to inform, relay messages and contribute to debate and reflection, even in times of crisis, the radio is an indispensable ally.

Today, we call upon public authorities and stakeholders in development and humanitarian action to strengthen the links between the radio and emergency response so that the voices of the men and women, victims, rescue workers and journalists, who we hear at such times over the transistor, the mobile phone or the computer, may be the voices of life and hope...

Irina Bokova